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COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

SECTORAL MEETING BETWEEN THE ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT: BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 45/9 of 25 October 1990 on cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in cooperation with the Secretary-General of OIC, to convene sectoral meetings in the priority areas of cooperation, including the areas of human resources development, environment and disaster relief, as recommended by the 1990 meeting of the focal points of the lead agencies of the two organizations.

2. Following consultations between organizations of the United Nations system and OIC, it was agreed to hold a sectoral meeting on the theme "Human Resources Development: Basic Education and Training".

II. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

3. The sectoral meeting on "Human Resources Development: Basic Education and Training" was held at Rabat from 24 to 26 April 1991. The main items on the agenda were: (a) review of current and planned programmes of the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized agencies in the domain of basic

education and training in the Islamic countries; (b) review of needs and priorities in basic education and training identified by Islamic countries or OIC; and (c) identification of possible areas and modalities of cooperation between the United Nations and OIC and its specialized agencies to meet the needs of the Islamic countries.

4. The meeting had before it working papers prepared by the participating organizations and agencies of the two organizations.

5. Representatives of the following departments, organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system participated in the meeting: Department for Special Political Questions, Regional Cooperation, Decolonization and Trusteeship of the Secretariat; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); World Food Programme (WFP); International Labour Organisation (ILO); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); World Health Organization (WHO); and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

6. Representatives of the following departments and specialized institutions of OIC participated in the meeting: General Secretariat, Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO); Islamic Foundation for Science, Technology and Development (IFSTAD); Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT); Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research (ICTVTR); and Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRTCIC).

7. UNESCO and ISESCO were designated lead agencies of the United Nations system and of OIC and its specialized institutions, respectively.

8. His Excellency Professor Abdelhadi Boutaleb, Director-General of ISESCO, opened the meeting with a welcome address. The inaugural session was addressed by His Excellency Dr. Tayeb Chkili, Minister for National Education of Morocco. Statements were also made by His Excellency Mr. Ousman N. R. Othman, Assistant Secretary-General of OIC, and the representatives of the organizations of the United Nations system.

III. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

A. General

9. The participants reviewed developments concerning basic education and training in Islamic countries in the light of the Declaration of the World Conference on Education for All, held at Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, and within the wider context of human development.

10. The participants, meeting in plenary sessions and in working groups, agreed on a framework for continued consultations and cooperation between the

United Nations system and OIC and its specialized institutions in the domain of basic education and training for human development. To this end, the participants agreed to support a multidimensional programme for human development that would encompass a variety of interrelated activities.

B. Commitment to human development and to education for all

11. The meeting noted that the Islamic countries were committed to a policy of human development that emphasized basic education, in particular, as a factor in national development. This was considered indispensable for creating the necessary capacities for endogenous development, for cultural renewal and for strengthening national integration and social cohesion. Access to education for both male and female citizens was recognized as a human right. The importance of science and technology in education was also emphasized, as was the need for creating linkages between education and other development issues such as health, agriculture, demography, the environment and the spiritual and cultural dimensions of development.

12. The meeting considered the relevance of the Special Islamic Programme for Literacy and Basic Training in Islamic Countries and Communities as an overall strategy for the development of human resources in the Islamic world. This programme was approved by the Second Extraordinary General Conference of ISESCO and cited by the World Conference on Education for All as an example of a framework for a regional plan of action. The meeting expressed satisfaction with the elaboration of this strategic framework and recommended that it should be supported, as appropriate, by the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized institutions.

C. Magnitude of problems in education

13. The meeting noted that, despite the commendable efforts of Islamic countries to provide basic education for children and adults, the situation regarding human resources development continued to be a matter of grave concern. Population statistics indicated that over 45 per cent of children of school age were out of school and a high percentage (more than 30 per cent) dropped out of school early, either for socio-economic reasons or for failure of the system to keep them. Percentage of illiterates and non-schooling children rose dramatically among girls and women, the urban poor and the rural population.

14. It was emphasized that the issues the Islamic countries faced today with respect to education were issues of quantitative and qualitative development. The Islamic countries had to increase resources for education, improve the quality of its personnel, adopt innovative approaches and methodologies, and, above all, ensure effective participation of the people in designing and implementing educational plans. It was recognized that, for the vast majority of low-income Islamic countries, finding adequate financial local resources would continue to be a problem for many years to come and that they would

deserve support from the higher-income Islamic countries, as well as from regional and international organizations.

D. Main challenges and priorities for the 1990s

15. The meeting considered the impact of internal and external factors on human development in Islamic countries. Among the most significant issues that had to be tackled were population growth, economic constraints, changing employment structures, the deterioration of the environment, drought and famine, far-reaching progress in science and technology, and the increasing production and exchange of knowledge and information. It was stressed that education and training should provide a solid foundation for dealing with these issues.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

16. The meeting was unanimous in its conviction that the most appropriate course of action for Islamic countries to take in order to meet the challenges of the future was to expand access to education to include all; to improve the quality of education; and to meet the learning needs of all citizens of all ages.

17. The meeting agreed that the provision of basic education for children and adults should be conceived as part of a series of socio-economic changes designed to bring about real improvement in the material, cultural and social conditions of society as well as the process of democratizing society as a whole.

18. The meeting further agreed that the Islamic countries should be assisted by both OIC and United Nations specialized agencies in designing and implementing educational plans to achieve real progress in meeting the basic learning needs of their populations, as a prerequisite for human development.

19. The meeting stressed the need for OIC and the United Nations system to strengthen and expand their cooperation for the benefit of Islamic countries in the domain of basic education and training to enable these countries to achieve their national goals of human development.

20. It was agreed that cooperation between OIC and the United Nations specialized agencies should be aimed at the following:

(a) Supporting the efforts of individual countries;

(b) Promoting dialogue and exchange of information and experience between countries;

(c) Facilitating the mobilization and the pooling of resources, and implementing joint activities benefiting two or more Islamic countries;

(d) Facilitating and promoting training programmes between member States of OIC, with particular emphasis on human resources development.

21. The meeting also agreed that a precondition for effective cooperation among agencies would be coordination, to the extent necessary, of their plans and the joint implementation of their work. In this connection, the meeting considered the existing mechanisms in the Islamic countries, such as the regional programmes and projects by UNESCO for universalization of primary education and eradication of illiteracy, as well as the special Islamic programme of ISESCO for the eradication of illiteracy, to be useful frameworks for cooperation between OIC and the United Nations system.

22. The meeting considered the interdisciplinary nature of the pressing needs of education, health, agriculture, the environment, population education, science and technology, and technical and vocational training. It also considered the need to strengthen research and information capacity in the Islamic countries. It recommended that OIC and the United Nations system should cooperate on a multidimensional integrated approach to basic education and training for human development in Islamic countries, covering the following areas of activity:

(a) Vocational and technical training of personnel;

(b) Preparation and dissemination of educational material;

(c) Research: collection of data and information;

(d) Administration of education;

(e) Introduction of science and technology in basic education programmes;

(f) Promotion of basic education and population education to meet the particular needs of girls and women;

(g) Protection of the environment;

(h) Health of the mother and child, including child spacing;

(i) Development of traditional educational institutions;

(j) Development of traditional industries and handicrafts;

(k) Development of vocational components into basic education programmes;

(l) Education for the disadvantaged.

23. In the implementation of the above recommendations, the meeting also agreed to the following:

(a) Each country would determine its areas of priority that would have a multiplier effect;

(b) Priority would be given to women and disadvantaged groups such as rural populations and other low-income groups;

(c) Exchange of expertise among Islamic countries would be increased;

(d) Non-governmental organizations would be invited to take a more active role in the development of human resources;

(e) The private sector, universities, research institutions and the media should play a leading role in the development of human resources.

V. FOLLOW-UP ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

24. With regard to follow-up action and implementation, it was agreed that:

(a) The focal points of the United Nations system and OIC for basic education and training, namely UNESCO and ISESCO, would continue consultations and close cooperation with each other, with a view to implementing the recommendations contained in the present report;

(b) A technical working group, comprising concerned organizations and agencies from the United Nations and OIC, should meet during the latter half of January 1992 to assess progress achieved and to make recommendations for the development of human resources;

(c) The meeting of the technical working group would be held at Jeddah, with OIC providing the necessary conference facilities for the meeting;

(d) The conclusions and recommendations of the Rabat meeting would be submitted to:

(i) The Twentieth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers;

(ii) The next general meeting between the representatives of the secretariats of the organizations of the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized institutions.